

From NMB-K

PROPOSED NEWS RELEASE ON BIKINI RESTORATION

Men and equipment will land on Bikini Atoll this month, beginning a major project by the U. S. Government to restore the atoll to a habitable condition for Bikinians who wish to return to the mid-Pacific Island.

Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) have joined Department of the Interior in the project. The Bikinians were resettled from the atoll before the U. S. nuclear testing program began there some 20 years ago. Now they want to return and the three governmental agencies have been ^{*Authorized*} ~~asked~~ by Executive Order to assist. Department of Defense will remove radioactive hazards and debris, the AEC will ~~be~~ ^{*be responsible for radiological safety*} ~~determine that no radiological hazard remains~~ and Department of the Interior will see to the actual relocation and resettlement of the Bikinians.

Vice Admiral L. H. Mustin, Director of the Defense Atomic Support Agency (DASA), has been named project manager by the Department of Defense. Most of the men and equipment will be provided by Major General E. H. deSaussure, Jr., who commands DASA's Joint Task Force 8. Air Force Colonel John W. Rawlings, Jr., will be in direct command of the restoration force on the Atoll.

Initial effort of the project will be to clean up the islands of Bikini and Enyu, both in the southeast part of the atoll. The atoll itself consists of a chain of large and small coral islands surrounding

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PROPOSED NEWS RELEASE ON BIKINI RESTORATION (CONT'D)

an oblong lagoon which measures about 10 by 25 miles. Bikini Island has an area of about two square miles; Enyu is slightly smaller.

The Department of Interior ^{estimated} ~~has said that~~ about 550 people have ^(land rights) asked ~~to be moved back to~~ Bikini. Of these, some 350 presently live on the island of ~~Enyu~~ ^{South} in the ~~nearby~~ Marshall Islands. The resettlement is expected to be gradual as Bikini's capability to support its people is developed.

Joint Task Force 8 has determined that the Bikini airstrip must receive first attention so that it can be used to support the restoration effort. The first men and equipment ashore this month will, after establishing their rudimentary camp, and beginning work on the airstrip, take the first precise steps toward mapping the restoration job.

Huge bunkers of reinforced concrete, various badly rusted steel towers and tangles of cables and girders must be located, moved to the beach and carried away. Preliminary survey indicates six months may be needed for the job, but a more comprehensive on-site study will provide more accurate time and cost estimates.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR BIKINI RESTORATION PROJECT

Q. Will similar projects be undertaken in behalf of other displaced natives, the Eniwetokians, for instance?

A. This project is limited to Bikini. I have no information on other projects.

Q. Will you salvage the ships sunk in the Bikini lagoon?

A. This project is limited to restoration of the land part of the atoll and does not include underwater salvage operations.

Q. Is the Defense Department going to resettle all the natives at once?

A. The Defense Department won't be resettling any natives. This project is being undertaken by three government agencies: Department of the Interior, Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission. Restoration of the islands falls within the DOD purview with AEC ascertaining that radioactive hazards have been eliminated. At this point, DOD will be out of the project and Department of the Interior will undertake the actual resettlement. AEC will continue various monitoring activities.

Q. Will any Bikinians be hired to work on the project?

A. Yes, Bikinians will be recruited. They will, however, not be employed in handling any contaminated scrap.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR BIKINI RESTORATION PROJECT (CONT'D)

Q. Won't the work force be exposed to dangerous radioactivity?

A. No. Radioactivity levels will be constantly and carefully monitored and the handling and removal of contaminated scrap will be so conducted that radiological exposure of personnel will be within the standards for workers established by the Federal Radiation Council.

Q. Men and equipment have been moved from Johnston Island to work on Bikini. Aren't they part of the nation's readiness-to-test program?

A. The Bikini clean-up will not be permitted to impair our readiness posture. If we are directed to resume testing, the men and equipment will be withdrawn from Bikini promptly. Not only will there be no impairment of readiness, but we expect to gain valuable experience in the Bikini operation and to exercise men and equipment.

Q. How much will this cleanup cost?

A. I can only give you the immediate budget picture. Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission are providing \$300,000 each ^{has estimated the total cost to be about \$1.2 mil.}

from FY 69 funds. Department of the Interior is budgeting \$700,000 for the project in FY 70. *to finish the cleanup work. It is requesting additional funds to begin construction of housing, and village facilities, replanting and resettlement.*

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